Prenatal vitamins [1]

Dear Alice,

Is it safe to be taking prenatal vitamins when you're not pregnant or planning on getting pregnant?

Answer

Dear Reader,

In today's world of advanced medicine, the multivitamin aisle may be an intimidating place. Broadening your knowledge on different types of vitamins is likely to help you make an informed decision when it comes to choosing the multivitamin that best fits your sex, age, reproductive health, and specific medical needs. Prenatal vitamins contain higher amounts of specific nutrients that are vital for both the mother and the developing fetus. While prenatal vitamins typically considered safe for adults in good health, they may not be appropriate if you are not pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

Rather than reaching straight for prenatal vitamins, try using multivitamins that are tailored to your individual needs. Prenatal vitamins typically contain higher amounts of vitamins and minerals than is recommended for a healthy, non-pregnant adult (or an adult who is not planning to become pregnant). Here are some additional points to consider:

- Prenatal vitamins contain about 27 milligrams of iron, which helps the mother and the baby's blood carry oxygen. However, this is much higher than the recommended 8 to 18 milligrams per day for adults, depending on age. Iron buildup in the body can cause constipation, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and in rare cases, death.
- Prenatal vitamins contain only 200 to 300 milligrams of calcium because they are intended to supplement calcium already received in the diet. Men and women typically need 1000 to 1200 milligrams of calcium. Relying on prenatal vitamins for your calcium needs isn't recommended. Calcium during pregnancy can prevent a new mother from losing her own bone density, as the fetus uses the mineral for bone growth.
- Folic acid is critical in preventing serious birth defects in the developing fetus, including spina bifida and anencephaly. Prenatal vitamins typically contain about 1000 micrograms of folate or folic acid per day?this is more than double the 400 micrograms per day requirement for healthy women and men.

There is a common myth that prenatal supplements promote thicker hair and stronger nails. A multivitamin supplement, in an appropriate formulation for most adults, contains the vitamins
and minerals that may be beneficial for healthy hair. Moreover, a diet containing adequate protein and lots of fresh fruits and vegetables is best for vibrant and healthy hair.

Above all, remember that different types of vitamins are more suitable than others for people of different sexes, ages, reproductive needs, and health statuses. Speaking with your health care provider may be helpful in gauging which vitamin supplement is best for your current lifestyle. Kudos to you for seeking more information to supplement your knowledge of multivitamins!

Alice!

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